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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS (CAS)  
NAMES 2017 PRINCIPALS OF THE YEAR**

**CHESHIRE (CT)** -- The Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) is pleased to announce the selection of the *2017 Principals of the Year*. Each year, nominations are accepted for the *Elementary, Middle, and High School Principal of the Year* awards. The winners are chosen by selection committees consisting of active and retired school administrators. Congratulations to these outstanding principals!

- **Carla Armistead, Principal, Chapel Street School, Stratford**  
2017 Elementary School Principal of the Year
- **Anthony Menard, Principal, East Hartford Middle School**  
2017 Middle School Principal of the Year
- **Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Newtown High School**  
2017 High School Principal of the Year

**Carla Armistead**

Carla Armistead, principal of Chapel Street School in Stratford, has been named the *2017 Elementary School Principal of the Year*. She was nominated for the award by Assistant Superintendent Dr. Linda Gejda, who describes her as “the embodiment of passion, a deep knowledge base and a strong work ethic.”

Upon hearing of her selection for this award, Armistead stated, “When I received the news of my selection, I felt very honored and extremely humbled. A principal cannot do the job alone, but it takes the hard work and dedication of a faculty and staff to truly make a difference. It is my privilege to lead and serve a wonderful community of learners and be representative of what principals do every day in moving forward the mission of ensuring that every child meets with social and academic success.”

A twenty-one-year veteran educator, Armistead has served the Stratford public schools for the past nine years and has selflessly invested her expertise and skill wherever they have been most needed. In 2014, following four years of success as principal of Stratford’s Eli Whitney Elementary School, Armistead was hand-picked by Superintendent Dr. Janet Robinson to take over the then struggling Chapel Street School. According to Fine Arts Coordinator Brian Frazier, Armistead’s “fortitude, bravery and determination” made her uniquely qualified to take on the challenge of rescuing a school that was plagued with a high principal turnover rate, low teacher morale, and widespread student discipline problems. Armistead immediately took steps to engage and energize her staff, introduce new instructional practices, and improve the social and cultural climate of the school.

Thanks to Armistead’s influence and efforts, Chapel Street is now a vibrant, caring, student-oriented learning community where students can grow socially and emotionally as well as academically. Reading specialist Julie Bienvenu recalls Armistead’s arrival during a “tumultuous period in which extraordinary leadership was required” and credits Armistead with the school’s turnaround. “The staff and students at Chapel Street have thrived under her exceptional leadership,” says Bienvenu.

Armistead has built a professional culture with a singular focus on new learning and she constantly challenges herself and her staff to pursue personal and professional growth opportunities. She vigilantly keeps abreast of educational research and resources and is a valued source of guidance and instructional support for her teachers and colleagues. Says Dr. Gejda, “Ms. Armistead is a lifelong learner who always remains current in the newest educational issues and practices.” Adds parent and PTA treasurer Lucille Marottolo, “Ms. Armistead always strives to improve her own working knowledge and expects her students and teachers to do the same in their classrooms.”

Despite her short tenure at Chapel Street, evidence of Armistead's positive impact can already be seen in several critical domains, from parent engagement, to staff morale, to student achievement. Her impact has been achieved by building strong, trusting relationships with parents and staff members and introducing new instructional strategies backed by data and rooted in high expectations. Says Superintendent Dr. Janet Robinson, "The turnaround in this school is remarkable. Carla truly demonstrates the skills and strategies of a highly effective educational leader, and we are proud to have her as an important member of our Stratford team."

### **Anthony Menard**

Anthony Menard, principal of East Hartford Middle School (EHMS), has been named the *2017 CAS Middle School Principal of the Year*. A skillful instructional leader who models a growth mindset and maintains consistently high expectations for students, staff and, most of all, himself, Menard was selected for his intrepid leadership in working with a broad network of stakeholders to bring about what he calls "dynamic, real and inspiring change."

Reacting to the announcement of his selection, Menard remarked, "This is a great award for our district and school--we have hardworking students and families that have committed to partnering with our teachers to make education and learning a priority."

Menard joined the EHMS administration as an assistant principal in 2009 at a time when the school was struggling with low test scores, high suspension rates, lack of leadership stability, a divided staff, and a negative public perception. He worked with his fellow administrative team members and key school leaders to turnaround the failing school, achieving a dramatic reduction in suspensions and chronic absenteeism, a marked increase in average daily attendance and a radical shift in public opinion. While once parents were refusing to send their kids to EHMS, now the school has a waiting list for its sixth grade program.

Upon assuming the principalship of EHMS in 2012, Menard ambitiously embarked upon whole school reform initiatives with the goal of building a learning community predicated on transparency, accountability, equity and academic rigor. He has led the restructuring of the school into theme-based college learning academics; developed an assessment calendar with universal screens and common assessments; implemented a co-teaching model for all special education students; created a formal writing workshop; and designed a comprehensive Parent Engagement Plan to connect with all families. Through these efforts, EHMS test scores continue to improve; its graduation rate continues to increase; its academic offerings and enrichment opportunities continue to expand; and the level of stakeholder investment in the school continues to deepen.

Principal of an urban school where 100% of students are eligible free or reduced-price lunches, Menard has succeeded in boosting the academic achievement of a diverse and challenging student body while at the same time improving the social and cultural climate of the school. Signs broadcasting the messages "Teach Like a Champion Today" and "Effort Matters" are posted outside of every classroom door. These are not just empty slogans but mantras that Menard promotes and practices each and every day. His now legendary morning announcements infuse the building with positive energy and inspire staff and students to higher levels of achievement and continuous improvement.

Says Superintendent of Schools Nathan Quesnel, "Anthony is characterized by a spirit of inspiration. When Anthony comes into a room, you can feel encouragement in his words, his kindness and his sincerity. Anthony inspires others to dream more, to expect more and do more because he leads by example." Adds parent Cari Magnano, "Mr. Menard is so enthusiastic about the future of the "Falcon Family" and seeing them succeed that it is quite contagious. It is evident everywhere!"

Of his many strengths, perhaps Menard's greatest is his ability to connect with kids. The positive, supportive relationships he consistently works to build with his students are the springboards for their success. Says Magnano, "Mr. Menard shows a personal interest in each and every child. His constant encouragement and casual conversations create a relationship and bond between the students and himself. Because of him, they sincerely want to achieve and be positive representatives of EHMS." Adds parent Nasreen Omari, "All our kids are his kids. He is very protective of them, acting as a father figure to all."

Menard has achieved the distinction of winning both the *Outstanding First Year Principal Award* and the *Principal of the Year Award*. He received the first-year principal award in 2013 following a very successful inaugural year at EHMS.

### **Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue**

Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, principal of Newtown High School (NHS), has been named the *2017 CAS High School Principal of the Year*. A reform-minded leader, Rodrigue embraces the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning with a fierce personal

commitment and unerring focus on what is best for children. Says Superintendent of Schools Dr. Joe Erardi, Jr., “Dr. Rodrigue is quite simply a first-rate instructional leader. She is incredibly smart; has a gift for galvanizing resources; and, never waivers from her goal of providing students with growth opportunities that have a common denominator of relevance and meaning.”

Upon receiving the call from selection committee chair Paul Newton, Rodrigue responded, “I am honored to receive the CAS/NASSP High School Principal of the Year award and further humbled to be selected as the state’s representative at the national level. My belief as school leader is that collaboration, caring, and innovative curricular opportunities lead to a positive culture and a dynamic learning environment for all. I am so proud to serve the students, staff, and families of Newtown and thank them for their ongoing support.”

Rodrigue began her career in Newtown, serving as a teacher and assistant principal for fifteen years before leaving in 2005 to assume her first principalship. In 2014, a year-and-a-half after the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School, she made the decision to return to her roots and take an active role in helping the community heal. Since then, she has worked with purpose and passion to help build what she calls “a personalized learning culture where members define themselves as caring, resilient, independent and intellectually curious individuals who continually strive to meet their full potential.”

Though nearly 1,700 students enter the doors of NHS each day, Rodrigue manages to maintain a warm, nurturing atmosphere where each one feels connected and engaged. She achieves this through the genuine affection and respect that she models for all members of the school community and through a spirit of caring that she radiates at all times. Highly visible and wholly immersed in all facets of school life, she is a fixture in the corridors and classrooms. Senior Simran Chand says, “What I admire most about my principal is her involvement, passion, and engagement. It is evident that she deeply cares about every member within this school community based on her well-known presence amongst students, her attendance at school events, the warm hugs she doles out to students, and that ever-present smile gracing her face.”

Since her return to Newtown three years ago, Rodrigue has been a catalyst for change both in her school and in the larger district. With the overarching goal of ensuring that all students have the opportunity to discover a college or career pathway that inspires their passions, she has spearheaded a number of successful programs which encourage innovation and authentic engagement. She introduced creative makerspaces, Project Lead the Way in Engineering, additional courses in the school’s Digital Academy, expanded arts offerings, professional learning communities (PLCs) for students, and a pilot capstone project for seniors. Her efforts have had positive and far-reaching effects which can be measured in the reduction in student failures, higher student investment in school-wide activities, and a consistently strong graduation rate.

Always looking to develop talent in others, Rodrigue embraces the premise that an important function of leadership is to foster more leaders. Described by Superintendent Erardi, as an administrator who “empowers others, builds capacity and values shared decision-making,” Rodrigue is a model of collaborative leadership. She always seeks out and carefully considers the viewpoints of all stakeholders — teachers, support staff, parents, students, and community members alike — inviting them to have a shared role in the governance of the school. Her monthly parent breakfasts have been a rich forum for idea sharing and have led to the implementation of several successful programs which have benefitted all members of the school community.

The hallmarks of Rodrigue’s leadership are her approachability, her irrepressible optimism, her unfailing compassion and her deep love for children. Says Director of Interim Human Resources Dr. David Abbey, “Lorrie’s greatest gift is that there is a joy and a purpose evident in everything she does.”

### **The State Principal of the Year Program**

The Principal of the Year Program, sponsored annually by the Connecticut Association of Schools, was established in 1984 to bring recognition to the principalship and to spotlight the important role of the principal in shaping the educational environment and experiences of children. The program recognizes outstanding school principals who have succeeded in providing high quality learning opportunities for students. These administrators have demonstrated excellent leadership, commitment to staff and students, service to their communities, and contributions to the overall profession of educational leadership.

Each year nominations are solicited for an Elementary, Middle and High School Principal of the Year. The winners are chosen by a selection committee consisting of active and retired principals and assistant principals. Nominees for the award are evaluated in the areas of personal excellence; collaborative leadership; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and personalization.

Armistead, Menard and Rodrigue will be honored by CAS at the “Celebration of Distinguished Administrators” to be held

on October 26, 2017, at Saint Clements Castle in Portland.

### **National Recognition Programs**

Armistead will represent Connecticut in the National Distinguished Principals (NDP) Program sponsored by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). One principal is chosen annually from each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands. Principals representing private K-8 schools, Department of Defense Dependents' Schools, and the U.S. Department of State Overseas Schools are also recognized. Public school principals are nominated by peers in their home states, and the final selection for each state's NDP is made by the NAESP state affiliate (in this instance, CAS). The national recognition events will take place in Washington, D.C. on October 12-13th. They include special tours and activities as well as opportunities for professional dialogue among the principals. The two-day celebration culminates in a formal awards banquet.

Dr. Rodrigue will represent Connecticut in the National Principal of the Year Award Program sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). She will compete for the national honor along with principals of the year from each of the other forty-nine states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and the Department of State Office of Overseas Schools. NASSP will recognize all state principals of the year at an Institute in Washington DC, September 24-27, 2017, which also serves as a forum for sharing their experience and expertise with each other, with national leaders in education and with federal legislators.

### **The Connecticut Association of Schools**

Established in 1953, CAS is a non-profit educational organization working with Connecticut's school leaders to improve elementary and secondary education in Connecticut. CAS' core mission - to promote excellence in the education of all students - is achieved through advocacy, professional development, recognition and student programs. Affiliated with the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the Association for Middle Level Education, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and the National Federation of State High School Associations, CAS represents nearly 900 of the state's public and parochial schools.

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